

Distinguished Members of the Public Health Committee:

My name is Peter Schwartz, and I live in West Hartford. I am here to ask that you please vote NO on HB 5326.

Legalizing assisted suicide -- which, even when cloaked in nice words like "dying with dignity," this clearly is -- would be a tragic step in the wrong direction.

I want to make clear that I am not questioning the good faith of the bill's supporters. I assume that most are motivated by compassion. But some things are just plain wrong. And assisted suicide, no matter what inspires it, is simply beneath us as a society.

It is undeniable that many terminally sick people experience pain and suffering. So do their families. I know this from personal experience as I watched my brother-in-law and a good friend -- both in their early forties -- die from brain cancer. I also lost both my mother and my father-in-law to lung cancer. Although those experiences were difficult, I witnessed up close how effective end-of-life care is in making the last days less of a trial. I can tell you that their deaths were not by any means a walk in the park, but their care WAS compassionate, and they DID die with dignity. I was amazed to see how effectively the hospice nurses were able to manage their pain. Taking the extraordinary step of allowing other people to be legally involved in ending the life of another human being, is simply not necessary given how effective hospice care can be.

I am also extremely concerned that this law will have a harmful effect on the phenomenon of suicide in general. Most of us have personal knowledge of a young person who, in the throes of a crisis, has taken their own life. By all accounts, this is a growing problem. But how are we to convince a young person that suicide should not be an option when, at the same time, we advertise

assisted suicide as a lawful and "compassionate" means for ending suffering?

I would also like to share my perspective on this bill as someone who has been a lawyer for almost thirty years. There are countless and constant legal battles waged over whether a deceased person was in fact competent to execute or change his or her will. If this can of worms is opened, it is inevitable that the same sorts of legal disputes will arise concerning the validity of instructions from the person who "authorized" the taking of his life. In the case of an assisted suicide, however, we will move from a dispute over who gets the money, to a controversy over whether there has been a proper assisted suicide, or instead, a homicide.

Finally, I'd like to refer you to the old legal maxim that "hard cases make bad law." This is exactly the situation here, where the emotional instinct to end suffering is leading some to consider a remedy which would be disastrous for our society as a whole.

The legalization of assisted suicide is a Pandora's Box that should never be opened. If people are not satisfied with the state of hospice care, let's focus on improving it. If patients are not sufficiently educated about the need for preparing living wills and end-of-life health care instructions, then let's work on that too.

But please do not let Connecticut take a step on this very slippery slope. Please vote NO on HB 5326.

Thank you for your consideration.

Peter Schwartz
1 Timber Lane
West Hartford, CT 06117